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Monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Note by the Secretary-General

1. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, contained in the annex to its resolution 48/96. These 22 rules provide a framework within which to further implement the goals of equality and full participation of persons with disabilities in social life and development as set forth in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the Assembly in its resolution 37/52.

2. In section IV, paragraph 2, of the Standard Rules, it was stipulated that the rules should be monitored within the framework of the sessions of the Commission for Social Development. The appointment of a Special Rapporteur to monitor their implementation was also envisaged in that paragraph.

3. In March 1994, the Secretary-General appointed Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development. Mr. Lindqvist prepared three reports for the consideration of the Commission during the carrying out of his mandate (see A/52/56, E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1 and E/CN.5/2002/4),[1] which was renewed in 1997 and in 2000 by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 1997/19 and 2000/10, respectively.

4. In June 2003, the Secretary-General appointed Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani (Qatar) Special Rapporteur for the period 2003-2005. The Special Rapporteur submitted an

* E/CN.5/2009/1, to be issued.

[1] Available from the United Nations enable website, at http://www.un.org/disabilities/.

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oral report to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-second session.[1] At its forty-third session, in February 2005, the Commission considered the report of the Special Rapporteur on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules during the 20 months following her appointment (see E/CN.5/2005/5 and Corr.1).[1] In its resolution 2005/9, the Economic and Social Council welcomed the work of the Special Rapporteur, decided to renew her mandate through 31 December 2008 and requested the Special Rapporteur to submit to the Commission an annual report on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules. At its forty-fourth, forty-fifth and forty-sixth sessions, in February 2006, February 2007 and February 2008, respectively, the Commission considered the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules during the previous 12 months (see E/CN.5/2006/4, E/CN.5/2007/4 and E/CN.5/2008/3).[1]

5. In its resolution 2008/20 of 24 July 2008, entitled "Further promotion of equalization of opportunities by, for and with persons with disabilities and protection of their human rights", the Economic and Social Council, decided to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur until 31 December 2011 in accordance with the provisions set down in section 4 of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to further their promotion and monitoring, including the human rights dimensions of disability, and the provisions of that resolution. The Council also requested the Special Rapporteur to further:

(a) Advocate the equalization of opportunities for, the full enjoyment of all human rights by, and the well-being of persons with disabilities in all respects, in line with the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;[2]

(b) Create awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including for the purpose of ensuring its wider signature and ratification by Member States;

(c) Act as a catalyst to promote international and technical cooperation on disability issues, including by identifying strategic areas for the exchange and sharing of expertise, best practices, knowledge, information and relevant technologies in order to enhance the capacity-building of Member States;

(d) Collaborate, in the fulfilment of the above tasks, with all relevant stakeholders, including organizations of persons with disabilities.

6. In the same resolution, the Economic and Social Council, also called upon all Governments to continue to cooperate and engage in direct dialogue with the Special Rapporteur and to provide him or her with all the relevant information needed to fulfil his or her mandate effectively and expressed concern at the insufficiency of resources for the Special Rapporteur, and recognized the importance of providing adequate resources for the implementation of the mandate by the Special Rapporteur.

7. The Economic and Social Council also requested the Special Rapporteur to submit to the Commission for Social Development an annual report on his or her activities in implementing resolution 2008/20. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission the annual report of the Special Rapporteur.

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[2] General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development on monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

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I. Introduction

1. This is my fifth and final report on the progress made by Member States in the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities[1] after six years of occupying the post of Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development.

2. It has been an honour to spend the past six years monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules; raising awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities; advocating for those rights; and urging Governments to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[2]

3. I have a great sense of accomplishment for the work that was done and an immense feeling of gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of my two terms as Special Rapporteur. Those individuals number in the hundreds and they are too numerous to mention.

4. I would like to thank all the individuals with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities around the world; the United Nations organizations and their members; the members of my staff and the volunteers who worked tirelessly over the past six years; the South-North Center for Dialogue and Development which was an effective and valuable partner in this work; the members of the Panel of Experts who were always ready with support and advice and a willingness to participate in all activities, initiatives and events; and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in New York.

5. I would like to especially thank the leadership of my own country, Qatar, for its continuous and unflagging support of my work. Without its financial support and the moral encouragement, no part of what we have done could have been accomplished.

6. Additionally, I would like to thank the Commission for Social Development for its confidence in me and the trust it accorded to me by renewing my mandate in 2005 for a second three-year term. This provided me with a great sense of encouragement and constituted a stamp of approval for the work I had been undertaking.

7. The present report provides a brief summary of the main activities undertaken in the past six years, followed by a short evaluation examining the impact of the work on the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. I will also present some of the challenges facing the movement from my point of view and based on my own experience during the past six years. Finally, I present several recommendations.

II. Overview of activities and achievements, 2003-2008

8. Upon commencing my role as the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, I formulated a strategic plan based on the following vision and mission statements: Vision: a world free of all forms of discrimination, obstacles and barriers, which enables its members to fully realize

[1] General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex.

[2] General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

their potentials; a world that allows all its members to participate equally in the enjoyment of its resources and to contribute to its advancement; Mission: to promote and monitor the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and to advance the status of persons with disabilities throughout the world. Based on these statements, the following objectives were identified:

(a) Promoting the implementation of the Standard Rules worldwide;

(b) Furthering their effective implementation;

(c) Assisting States in assessing levels of implementation and measuring progress;

(d) Identifying obstacles and suggesting suitable measures for more successful implementation;

(e) Providing advisory and consultative services to States and organizations;

(f) Facilitating the exchange of information and experiences between and among States and organizations of persons with disabilities;

(g) Coordinating the efforts and resources of international, regional, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and steering them towards the implementation of the Standard Rules;

(h) Encouraging the involvement of the Panel of Experts in reviewing, advising and providing feedback on the best way to promote, implement and monitor the Rules.

9. The following were identified as means of achieving the above-stated objectives: monitoring; advocacy; awareness-raising; identifying partners; coordinating activities, resources and expertise; communicating, corresponding, and exchanging information and expertise; and holding periodic theme-driven meetings, seminars and symposiums.

10. The period from 2003 to 2008 saw a number of achievements in the disability movement in various arenas, several of which directly coincided with or were related to my work, or had been initiated by my office.

11. During the past six years, persons with disabilities increasingly became a priority in the international development agenda, gaining prominence through the negotiations, drafting and adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto.[3] The Convention may be considered one of the major milestones in the history of the disability movement and it has been my greatest pleasure to be a part of the process leading to its adoption, and to contribute to that effort through raising awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities, and urging Governments to sign and ratify the Convention.

12. Stimulated by the negotiations on the Convention which were held during the eight sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities held from 2002 to 2006 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, awareness of the importance of the disability movement and what it

[3] General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex II.

stands for grew exponentially at governmental and societal levels worldwide. In turn, organizations of persons with disabilities gained strength and capacity, becoming more vocal and increasing cooperation and coordination across disabilities, as well as across cultures and geographical borders. This also prompted greater recognition of the role and work of the Special Rapporteur on Disability and, particularly, of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

13. In that context, I attended the meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee on the drafting of the Convention from 2003 to 2006, lending support to the issues important to organizations of persons with disabilities through strategic interventions at those meetings.

14. From the inception of my mandate, I focused on building on the work undertaken by my predecessor, Bengt Lindqvist. The supplement to the Standard Rules developed by Mr. Lindqvist guided my prioritization of issues related to children and women with disabilities; persons with disabilities in developing countries living in poverty and difficult circumstances; and persons with psychosocial disabilities. Previous annual reports to the Commission for Social Development contain details on this work.

A. Regional initiatives

15. At an early stage of the carrying out of my mandate, I advocated for the proclamation of the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities by the League of Arab States in 2004. Realizing that the Arab region was the only region in the world at the time that had not yet proclaimed a disability decade, and mindful of the fact that the rights of persons with disabilities in the region did not yet hold a priority position in the agendas of Governments and human rights advocates, I deemed it appropriate to take advantage of my regional background to advocate for their rights and bring about positive change in the lives of persons with disabilities in the Arab region.

16. Using the momentum created by the proclamation of the Arab Decade, I had persuaded the Arab Parliamentary Union to establish an Arab Parliamentary Committee on Disability within the Union. This was followed by practical and immediate steps to build the capacity of Arab parliamentarians with regard to disability legislation through a series of symposiums held in a number of Arab countries and hosted by the parliaments/shura councils of these countries, using one or two rules from the Standard Rules as a theme for each symposium. Symposiums have been held in Amman (March 2005), Beirut (December 2005), Yemen (March 2007) and Morocco (July 2007) and another will be held in Qatar in January 2009. The symposiums marked the first time that Arab parliamentarians and legislators met and held an open dialogue with persons with disabilities. These efforts were the catalyst for the establishment of new partnerships, chief among them with the Council of Europe, the Commission on Disability of the Government of Germany and the Flemish Parliament of Belgium.

B. International initiatives

17. Throughout the exercise of my mandate I have fostered open dialogue with United Nations organizations at the international and regional levels to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their development agendas. In undertaking all my activities, representatives of United Nations organizations were invited to participate in meetings held both with organizations of persons with disabilities and with Governments.

18. With respect to whether issues related to persons with disabilities belong in the agenda of development or human rights, I made my position clear when, pursuant to my request to speak with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and at the Human Rights Council, I emphasized the point that "the issues of persons with disabilities belong to both agendas — the social development agenda and the human rights agenda". It should be increasingly recognized that social development and human rights are complementary and interdependent.

19. In September 2005, I had succeeded, with the support of the members of the Panel of Experts and the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, in persuading Governments to include persons with disabilities in the review of the Millennium Development Goals at the World Summit. The campaign led to a reconsideration of the draft outcome document and the inclusion of mention of persons with disabilities in two paragraphs thereof. However, the parallel campaign to persuade Heads of State to include disability in their speeches resulted in only three references to disability. On 25 September 2008, the issue of disability in relation to the Millennium Development Goals was revisited at the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals which was convened by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly to review progress on the Goals.

20. Another initiative created during my six-year term involved the World Bank and disability funding. As presented to former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, the initiative entailed the inclusion by the World Bank of a disability component in all projects funded by the Bank, ensuring that at least 10 per cent of the funds would be spent on disability-related programmes. Although this initiative was not adopted by the Bank for a variety of reasons, it generated much debate within the disability movement and gained a great deal of support from those involved in funding for development.

21. During my term, I visited nearly 40 countries to assess the situation of persons with disabilities living in poverty and in difficult conditions. In monitoring countries' implementation of the Standard Rules, I engaged in a monitoring programme that included the following activities:

(a) Country visits and meetings with Government representatives and organizations of persons with disabilities in all countries visited;

(b) Field visits to service and rehabilitation centres in all countries visited;

(c) Meetings with ministers of finance to ensure that commitments made by all sectors of government would be included in national budgets in order to guarantee their implementation.

C. Global Survey on Government Actions on the Implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

22. Monitoring activities on the Standard Rules included a Global Survey conducted in partnership with the South-North Center for Dialogue and Development. The survey was designed to determine the extent to which Governments were implementing the Standard Rules; to determine differences in perceptions regarding implementation between Governments and organizations of persons with disabilities; and to examine the extent to which implementation of the Standard Rules had made tangible differences in the lives of persons with disabilities.

23. The Survey encompassed all Member States and was distributed to one government body and to two organizations of persons with disabilities in each country. Responses were received from 114 countries. Two reports have been published on the results of the Survey and a third will be published early in 2009. The analysis of the Survey yielded a list of 324 measures derived from the Standard Rules that could be used by Governments and organizations of persons with disabilities as a checklist and guide for achieving equalization of opportunities.

D. Awareness-raising

24. Awareness-raising at every level of society is an important precondition for the implementation of the Standard Rules. Real change cannot occur without awareness of issues, needs, potentials, and contributions of persons with disabilities. Measures are needed to change stereotypic images and to increase awareness regarding the human rights of persons with disabilities. I have attempted to use the media and media-related activities to raise awareness, change perceptions, present a positive image of persons with disabilities and create awareness at all levels of society. The following activities were undertaken to fulfil that objective:

(a) Media interviews, appearances on talk shows and call-in shows, and televised or videotaped statements;

(b) Production of television spots and public education announcements;

(c) Production of video clips designed to attract younger audiences and turn their attention to the rights of persons with disabilities;

(d) Short documentaries that portrayed the realities of the lives of persons with disabilities and presented them in a positive manner.

25. Recognizing that media campaigns can be achieved only if persons producing media have adequate knowledge and are able to shed their own prejudices and stereotypes, I also launched a series of workshops aimed at educating media persons, raising their awareness and enlisting them as powerful and far-reaching allies in the service of disability rights. Two such workshops were held, in the Syrian Arab Republic (2006) and in Egypt (2008).

26. The office of the Special Rapporteur launched three full-fledged media awareness-raising campaigns (The Right to Education and Employment (2005), Difference is Normal (2006), and War and Disability (2008)), which received

worldwide attention. Although these productions were designed to target a predominantly Arab audience and featured Arab persons with disabilities, they have been in demand in a number of African and European countries and have been used by organizations of persons with disabilities in the United States of America. These productions have won a number of awards over the past three years at international theme-driven film festivals.

27. I initiated a dialogue with writers and producers of drama for Arab television to encourage them to introduce characters with disabilities into their storylines, with the aim of using media to present positive images of persons with disabilities. As television dramas enter almost every home in the region and are viewed by people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds and from all walks of life, they represent a potentially powerful means of influencing the attitudes of large numbers of people through entertainment. The idea found favour among many and was adopted and implemented in two Syrian dramatic productions which aired during the month of Ramadan in 2006 and 2007.

28. From the date of adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2006 to that of the writing of the present report, efforts have intensified to raise awareness through the Convention of disability rights, to persuade Governments to sign and ratify the Convention and to implement the Convention. In recognition of the role I had played in promoting the Convention and of the effectiveness of awareness-raising efforts, the Commission for Social Development, at its forty-sixth session held in February 2008, had drafted a resolution which it recommended for adoption by the Economic and Social Council,[4] in which the Council would request the Special Rapporteur on Disability to include work related to the Convention among his or her responsibilities. The draft resolution was subsequently adopted by the Council on 24 July 2008 (resolution 2008/20).

III. Evaluation of the results of the work of the Special Rapporteur during the period 2003-2008

29. At a personal level, I am very gratified by the comments I received on how my work has impacted the disability movement generally. One of the most rewarding developments, which for me has signalled an acknowledgement of success, was the resolution of the Commission for Social Development to expand the mandate of the Special Rapporteur to include, in addition to the promotion and monitoring of the Standard Rules, promotion and advocacy of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

30. It is important to recognize that there is no conflict between the human rights agenda and the development agenda, as they are synergistic and interdependent. Human rights are real when they result in a change in people's daily lives. Human rights are not fully implemented if they do not include the right to development.

[4] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 6* (E/2008/26), chap. I, sect. A, draft resolution IV.

31. The work I have undertaken with various partners and with the support of my country and its leadership has resulted in added value to the disability movement. In particular, I highlight the following:

(a) **Elevating awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities so as to reach the highest levels of government**. While the negotiation, drafting, adoption and signing of the Convention served to create a great deal of awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, taking this perspective into parliamentary chambers and legislative circles by engaging Heads of State, Government officials and legislators served to elevate the status of the issue of the rights of persons with disabilities to one of political importance, as exemplified, inter alia, by a request from the First Lady of Lebanon for assistance in the development of a national disability strategy and action plan;

(b) **Promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the agenda of the United Nations organizations involved in development**. During all country visits and in every meeting organized by the Office of the Special Rapporteur, United Nations organizations were invited to become involved in order to increase their connection with organizations of persons with disabilities and to promote recognition of inclusive development as a significant and essential aspect of their work. Although much work remains to be done, there has been success in raising the awareness among development practitioners of the importance of programmes that are inclusive in respect of persons with disabilities;

(c) **Establishing a benchmark in disability research and statistics**. The Global Survey on Government Actions on the Implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities has resulted in what has been described as the "most comprehensive body of research into disability". It identified the measures to be implemented by Governments and, as noted above, yielded information on 114 countries;

(d) **Raising the profile of persons with disabilities in the Arab region**. The Arab region had lagged behind all regions of the world in terms of disability awareness when I commenced my term as Special Rapporteur. By the deadline (in 2005) for collecting responses to the Global Survey, 19 of the 22 Arab countries had provided data on disability. The increased interest at the level of Governments and civil society organizations was marked by the unprecedented number of meetings that were held on the issue in the region. Additionally, media awareness has grown exponentially over the past six years and persons with disabilities have become more visible in public life;

(e) **Stronger representation in the developing world**. While consideration of the rights of persons with disabilities had previously seemed to be within the purview only of Western and industrialized countries, over the past six years there has been greater representation from developing countries in international organizations of persons with disabilities. As a case in point, the majority of those elected to membership in the Executive Council of Disabled Peoples' International (Republic of Korea, 2007) were from developing countries;

(f) **Regional monitoring body**. During their last meeting at the headquarters in Egypt of the League of Arab States, Arab organizations of persons with disabilities announced the establishment of a regional monitoring body to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The secretariat and the work of the body are entirely funded by private sector contributions and donations, indicating the growing awareness of and interest and involvement in the rights of persons with disabilities on the part of sectors that were never involved previously.

IV. Activities in 2008

32. During the past year, I attended and spoke at a number of meetings on issues including democracy, human rights, municipal councils, and violence against women, which presented excellent opportunities to mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into civic, political and social matters whose relevance to disability is often overlooked or ignored.

33. During the first half of 2008, the Office of the Special Rapporteur and the Supreme Council for Family Affairs in Doha organized a regional workshop on accessibility. One of the main contributors to the workshop was Michael Fox, President of RI and accessibility expert. The workshop also resulted in the launching of a long-term programme entitled "Qatar Accessible For All". A second workshop is planned for the last quarter of 2008.

34. In continuing its efforts to promote the Convention, my Office organized a national workshop on the Convention in which participants from civil society and government departments were led through a detailed examination of the articles of the Convention and the means of their implementation.

35. In cooperation with the South-North Center for Dialogue and Development, and the Supreme Council for Disability Affairs in Jordan, the Office of the Special Rapporteur held an international symposium on "Research and statistics in the area of disability" in conjunction with the launch of phase two of the analysis of the Global Survey on Government Actions on the Implementation of the Standard Rules. The symposium was attended by a number of international researchers and representatives of the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations organizations, and members of the Panel of Experts, as well as university professors, statisticians and Government representatives from the region.

36. The third media campaign created by my Office, on the theme "War and Disability", had been designed to draw attention to the ever-mounting human cost of war. Launched in Beirut, the campaign juxtaposed the demands for increased funding for services, rehabilitation, better medical care and nutrition and increased accessibility in all its forms, and efforts to prevent and treat disability with the destruction of lives and limbs caused by the wars and armed conflicts occurring in over 65 areas in the world. Participants were given a campaign toolkit which included a DVD of the films and TV spots, campaign posters and fact sheets to enable them to launch their own awareness campaigns on the relationship between war and disability.

37. The War and Disability campaign resulted in the issuance of a document entitled "The Beirut Commitment" in which participants agreed on five goals, the first of which focused on advocating and lobbying for the ratification and full implementation of the Convention as the starting point for any rights-based advocacy for persons with disabilities.

38. As noted above, the 2008 media workshop was held in Cairo, building on the efforts of educating the media and raising their awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities, so as to encourage their positive representation in media; and the first media workshop had been held in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2006. The Cairo media workshop was held in cooperation with the National Council on Childhood headed by the First Lady of Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak.

39. I participated as keynote speaker in the pan-European seminar organized by the European Network on Independent Living entitled "Towards Deinstitutionalization of Women and Men with Functional Disability", held in Spain. The focus of my presentation was policies on deinstitutionalization, drawing on guidance from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

40. In April 2008, the Office of the Special Rapporteur facilitated a visit to Doha by a delegation from the All China Federation for Persons with Disabilities and the Chinese Paralympics Committee, which included meetings with Olympic officials, rehabilitation centres, sports centres for persons with disabilities, schools and service organizations for children and persons with disabilities.

41. In May 2008, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Naser al Misnad requested the Office of the Special Rapporteur to conduct a national survey similar to the Global Survey. The purpose of the exercise is to assist policymakers and decision makers in Qatar in developing policies, programmes and projects that will respond to the needs of persons with disabilities at the national level.

42. In July 2008, after witnessing the media coverage of the War and Disability campaign, the First Lady of Lebanon, Wafaa Suleiman, made contact with the Office of the Special Rapporteur. An agreement was reached to assist the First Lady in developing a comprehensive six-year strategy to adopt disability rights, including setting policy to be adopted by the Government of Lebanon for the benefit of persons with disabilities. The Office of the Special Rapporteur, in partnership with the South-North Center for Dialogue and Development, has held three planning meetings with the Office of the First Lady.

43. One of my most rewarding meetings was in August 2008 with the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and the secretariat of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, demonstrating the leadership and commitment at the highest level of the United Nations with respect to the full equalization of opportunities for and rights of persons with disabilities.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

44. The Standard Rules remain a practical framework that defines obstacles and barriers and provides guidelines on what needs to be done to achieve equalization of opportunities across the board in any given society. Although it is a historic milestone, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should not signify that the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is to now be ignored.

45. In the many meetings and encounters I have had over the years in all regions and countries, it became clear that the political will to achieve equalization of opportunities was strong. However, lack of resources and expertise has been

commonly cited as an obstacle. Therefore, I believe that a focus on international and interregional cooperation in policy and practice is one of the most effective ways to hasten the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Standard Rules. I have often stressed, in this context, that international and interregional cooperation does not imply that developed or rich countries should merely transfer funds to poorer countries. International cooperation should include the exchange of expertise and technical support, whereby decision makers would be urged to avail themselves of the experience of others in developing strategies designed to achieve the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities and respect for and promotion of their rights.

46. The role played by organizations of persons with disabilities is the most important contributing factor as regards keeping disability rights within the sphere of interest of and as a priority in all agendas. It is important that these organizations claim and are accorded a greater role in policymaking, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation at the international, regional, national and local levels. The effective representation of persons with disabilities in all monitoring mechanisms, especially committees of international human rights treaties, is indispensable for effective implementation of agreements.

47. Despite the fact that 15 years have elapsed since the adoption of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and that more than 25 years have elapsed since the adoption of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, levels of implementation are still below those targeted in the commitments, both moral and legal, made by countries towards promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. This indicates that there is a strong and urgent need to develop effective national mechanisms for offering incentives and monitoring the implementation of commitments made by Governments. Such implementation, to be truly effective, must reach all persons with disabilities, their families and communities, and the societies in which they live.

48. The existence of conventions and agreements, although extremely important, will not change the situation of persons with disabilities if there is no change in the levels of awareness and the degree of knowledge regarding persons with disabilities and their needs, rights, abilities, potentials, and contributions. A positive shift is needed in the attitudes towards persons with disabilities; and the manner in which they are viewed should exclude both discrimination and pity and encompass a readiness to work with and involve them in all aspects of life.

49. I recommend most strongly that the rights of persons with disabilities should become integral to all of the work of the United Nations. Despite efforts over the past four years to include the rights of persons with disabilities in the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, success has been limited. However, if the rights of persons with disabilities are not included, the Goals will not be achieved.

50. I urge all countries to review and adopt national legislation in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to develop programmes and plans of action, and to earmark funds for their effective and expeditious implementation. Moreover, I urge those countries that have not yet signed or ratified the Convention, to do so as a matter of priority, so as to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.